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ABSTRACT

A project in creative writing and literacy was developed and implemented for people experiencing mental health difficulties. The project was a jointly organized activity between Dearne Valley College and Doncaster MIND in England. (MIND is a network of mental health associations in England and Wales.) The college counselor acted as the supervisor for MIND counselors and two lecturers from the college set up an appropriate educational course. One lecturer was very experienced in teaching creative writing to groups that had included people with mental health problems and the other was experienced in teaching basic skills. The educational process was a student-centered approach that included the following: continual negotiation with clients on the curriculum and content of sessions, frequent reviews, small steps leading to increased self-confidence and self-esteem, and as much user participation as possible. Empowerment was seen as crucial to project success. During the initial 8 weeks, lecturers got to know the members, their interests, and abilities. Fourteen weeks into the project, these results were tabulated: 11 people had enrolled, with 7 attending regularly; all users were on powerful drugs that could affect attendance and participation; learning had evolved according to users' interests and ability; the whole group had participated in writing in various forms; and frequent discussions were a form of group therapy. Users' and MIND staff questionnaires were administered. (Appendixes include questionnaire findings and selections of students' writing.) (YLB)

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ED 413 481

Dearne Valley College

Educational Project with

MIND

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Educational Project with MIND

An Outline of a Current Project in Creative Writing & Literacy for People Experiencing Mental Health Difficulties

Introduction

This paper is a response to a request from FEDA & NIACE asking for information about the Creative Writing project which is a jointly organised activity between Dearne Valley College and Doncaster MIND. FEDA/NIACE are collecting information as part of nationally based research on adult learners and mental health. In this paper we have set out to describe the project and its rationale, and also to collate information from users and providers collected via questionnaires.

The Origins of the Project

The Director of MIND in Doncaster approached the Dearne Valley College when he identified an educational need in the particular client group who met in the small town of Mexborough. The users of MIND there comprised of several graduates as well as people with basic skills needs. Some of them had asked for creative writing and others for literacy and numeracy. There was also a need for support for some of the MIND counsellors. We set up a partnership in which the college counsellor would act as the supervisor for counsellors in Doncaster MIND and two lecturers from the college would set up an appropriate educational course. Both lecturers came from the basic skills/ learning support section of the college. One of the lecturers was very experienced in teaching creative writing to groups which had included people with mental health problems and the other experienced in teaching basic skills.

The Aims of the Project

The initial aims of the project were rooted in the tutors' experience of teaching basic skills where the educational process is often the most important part of the work rather than measurable outcomes. By this we meant a student-centred approach with continual negotiation with clients on the curriculum and content of the sessions, frequent reviews, small steps leading to an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem and as much user participation as possible. From an Adult Education perspective it needed to be as close to a Freirean model as possible; a shared learning experience based on a relationship of trust between tutors and learners in an equal partnership. We needed to challenge the pattern of disempowerment which is rife amongst people with mental health difficulties as society categorises this group of people and the stigma is often accepted by the sufferers themselves in their relationship to their own illnesses.

We saw the empowerment process as being crucial to the success of the project. We felt it was in the level of user participation and partnership, and not only in increase of self-confidence, that the learners would gain power and control over their learning. At this stage we only had a rough idea of how much of the work would be therapeutic although we suspected from past experience that therapy would have a high place in the process of learning and empowerment.

To enable this to happen, the aims were formulated as follows

(1) To enable creative writing and literacy to take place in a comfortable, supportive and stable atmosphere through

(a) working at the Day Centre
(b) using basic skills trained staff
(c) having a high staffing ratio

(2) To be a first step in the preparation for mainstream college, if appropriate, through

(a) maintaining standards of practice and quality in line with college activity
(b) raising awareness of other college activities
(c) showing enthusiasm for learners taking up other college activities and supporting their decision

(3) To encourage and develop the students' literary creativity and improve the access to written communication through

(a) a planned and negotiated range of activities in line with The Basic Skills Agency guidelines
(b) making use of accredited schemes for both creative writing and literacy

(4) To enable the sharing of creative ideas, feelings and emotions with fellow students through

(a) choosing a session framework where such activity is valued and time made for it to occur
(b) to respond to student need by extending the remit of feelings and ideas to include ones other than those specifically covered in the session, if appropriate

(5) As a therapeutic tool in enabling communication about their feelings with others through

(a) having a staffing ratio high enough to provide individual attention as necessary
(b) choosing activities which may promote, rather than inhibit, self-exploration

(6) As an empowering activity, providing students with the means to negotiate their learning through

(a) using individualised learning plans, with full negotiation throughout to BSA standards
(b) using medium term negotiation and steering sessions which are built into the scheme of work
(c) promoting respect for all views as per the college's equal opportunities policy

The Initial Eight Weeks of the Project

We used this as an induction period in which we got to know the members, their interests and abilities. We had worked very much as a group and we felt that the time was right for negotiation. We asked them what they would like to continue doing and they made their own individual decisions although we made sure that they came together a group each week as well to share their writing. Three members had shown particular talent in writing poetry and we decided to explore different forms in that medium; one person wanted to write one act plays; one talented musician wanted to concentrate on writing songs and most weeks he played the guitar and performed his songs at the end of the session. Those people who wanted more basic skills continued to improve their literacy through their own creative writing which was often stimulated by their personal experiences. It was at this point that two members of the group decided to come into college, one to attend the workshop for literacy, numeracy and word-processing and the other for French.

Fourteen Weeks Into The Project

We talked to the staff at MIND and reflected on what had happened. Eleven people had enrolled with seven attending regularly. All the users were on powerful drugs which could affect both their attendance and participation. The learning had evolved according to the users' interests and ability. A third member now started attending college for word-processing. The whole group had participated in writing in various forms such as descriptive writing, narratives and poetry. Nearly all the participants now were happy to read their work to the group and we encouraged positive feedback from any member. There was a great deal of discussion on topics chosen and it became clear that some of the discussions were a form of group therapy. The most outstanding example of this was when a member of the group who suffered from severe clinical depression wrote his first poem 'A Depressive's Christmas'. Other members quickly identified with his feelings and it opened up a discussion on depression and what it actually meant. Others started writing about their feelings about alcoholism, sleep deprivation and death. We talked to the college counsellor about what was happening and she expressed the view that for some people it was very hard to verbalise their emotions and the written word was a very powerful therapy, not only for individuals but often for the whole group.

We devised one questionnaire to get the users' views of the provision and another for the staff. The findings from the questionnaires are at the end of this paper.

Conclusion

We are very excited by the work with this group of people and feel that it should be expanded and developed. Professor Tomlinson states in his report that many people are excluded from educational provision by virtue of mental ill health. This is clearly unacceptable. One in four adults may experience some form of mental ill health in their lives and it must be the duty of all of us to ensure that these people are not excluded from education and society. Many people will recover and integrate back into further or higher education, society and employment and we should explore all possible avenues to enable this process to happen. Future developments could well include other creative subjects such as art and drama continuing the more imaginative approach to content and curriculum than the traditional 'back to work' skills of writing CVs and letters of application. Funding should be found for this educational work and it should be a partnership between adult education, mental health agencies, health authorities and Social Services. In this way we will facilitate the empowerment of a currently very

disempowered group of people and return to the purpose and function of adult education as described by H. A. Jones in 'A Rationale for Adult Education' 1971:
'There are no slaves now, but it seems to me that the pressures of our society are enslaving rather than liberating pressures ..... The function of adult education is to keep open the options, to prevent the arrest of development by the pressures of society, to ensure that whatever the stage of self-knowledge or self-fulfilment that has been reached, the way of future growth is visible.....'

Helen Ruddock Paul Worrall February 1997

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How the Questionnaire was Administered

We produced two types of questionnaire, one for users and one for MIND workers involved in the project. The questions were chosen to cover the aims we had formulated. We offered people the opportunity to have their thoughts and ideas recorded onto tape if they felt the level of literacy required was too demanding. Two users had their responses recorded in this way (the oral questions were slightly different from the written originals) These responses were then transcribed onto the written questionnaire appropriately. All the questionnaires which we gave out were returned. We collated responses question by question for both the users' and the staff questionnaires.

Findings

Staff Questionnaire

Responses were from the Director of Doncaster MIND and the manager of the Mexborough premises

1. What do you see as the benefits to the users of the Creative/Writing literacy Programme?

Thoughts included

Complementing existing skills; enabling creative activity; instilling confidence; increasing self awareness; developing as a group; sharing experiences which informs work produced;

Caters for all aspects of need; programme sensitively thought out; each person has been allowed to develop their skills and confidence both as a group and as an individual; users have a feeling of commitment and responsibility; sharing work with others gives them a feeling of self worth and opens up new directions within creativity; issues worked on are discussed as topics outside the session.

2. How do you see the work developing both for this group and for future groups?

Thoughts included

To link with other users in the Dearne Valley Area; work in conjunction with other agencies and organisations; to raise and maintain awareness of mental health issues within the local community; have work published in the local media, put on plays...

The invitation to add further comments was not taken up.

The Users Questionnaire

1. How do you feel about the creative writing sessions?

" I enjoy the sessions very much and I look forward to them every week"

" I wish they were quieter, as I have such difficulty concentrating, otherwise I'm happy to attend and feel the sessions could be of benefit to me"

"I like them because I need the discipline of a set time to work"

"Enjoyable, but sometimes difficult to cope with due to lack of ability to concentrate"

"Well I think it's going down reet (sic) very good cause it gets people from outside to come in and have a go"

"Great, learning a new skill, learning how to actually read and write"

"I feel that it might be worthwhile"

2. How would you feel about taking part in other college activities?

"I would love to but unfortunately I cannot get easily to the college"

"Fine"

" I was enthusiastic at first, but, after coming down to reality, realised it might not be a good idea to take too much on, because I feel lethargic a lot of the time"

"When I'm less stressed, more able to concentrate, less tired, more confident, off the booze a while longer- yes. Subjects such as sociology, computers."

"I would consider this in the future and I would be interested if other courses in the college could be held in the day centre"

"I come into college 2 days. On Tuesdays I do word processing and Thursday I do English in the morning and Maths in the afternoon."

"Absolutely all right... went on computers and that was all great"

3. Do you think your ability to write creatively has improved through the sessions? If so, in what way?

"Yes... I have learned how to write poetry in different styles, in fact I feel I have learned to write poetry which I couldn't do before the sessions. Also the skills such as spider charts, the instructions from the tutors have all helped me to write creatively in an organised way"
"I've not attended enough sessions... to make a statement as yet"

"Yes, by using my mind and imagination"

"Possibly. Writing prose. Would like to write sketches."

"Not bad, I want to get it better."

"I want to improve a bit more. (Tutor: Do you think you are improving?) I think I'm just about getting there"

"I always had the ability to write creatively - it's just a matter of inspiration. Perhaps though, I have improved a little. I have tried to work my way out of depression from my youth up so far to no avail."

4. How do you feel about the times when your work and the work of others is shared and discussed?

"I like this, I feel we are very close as we listen to another person's innermost thoughts and feelings, and also seeing how others view the same subject in different ways."

"I can't say about others' work but I'm usually happy for mine to be shared or discussed"

"Not so happy - too much noise - too much disruption. But occasionally people concentrate and share and discuss. The tutors are, of course, very obliging."

" I enjoy this because it boosts my confidence if other people in the group like what I have wrote (sic) and the comments also help to improve what I have wrote (sic). I also enjoy hearing other people's work because some really good pieces of writing poetry, etc. have come out of the sessions and this in turn inspires me to write more."

"It's always nice to share thoughts and feelings and have discussions about each other's work."

"It's like having a surprise"

"Well like it's my own thing. I enjoy doing the writing and when Paul reads it out and when people think that it's good enough, it makes me feel even better."

5. To what extent do you consider the creative writing sessions and the writing at home between the sessions to be a form of therapy?

"I suffer from fits and it helps me to get the fits off my mind"

"Yes. As soon as my reading and writing are all right I'll stop coming."

"Well it is a form of therapy but it clashes with my poetry group"

" I think creative writing in the sessions and at homes is really good therapy. When I am feeling depressed or anxious I find it helps to try and concentrate on writing a poem, somehow getting the feelings and ideas down on paper somehow eases the depression/anxiety. It takes your mind off the problems etc."

"Probably not"

"Despite the negatives such as noise at the creative writing sessions, just my getting involved can only help me get more confidence being in a group of this kind and to prepare me for future groups. Anything contributing to my confidence is a therapy."

"Unfortunately I cannot sit at home and work on my own."

6. Do you feel you are in charge of your own learning and work in this group?

"Yes the options are there for close one-one with Helen or Paul, or to go and sit in another room at your own speed"

"To a degree, yes."

"No"

"Yes to a good extent. I feel I get out what I put in I am always glad of the help and advice I get from the two tutors."

"Yes, in a way"

"I do, yes."

7. How would you like to see the work developed?

"I'd like to get more word processing so I can get all my work put on."

"As far as possible"

"Get better! It's all right as it is."

" I would hope this to be ongoing, it has brought us together in a friendly group. As a group it would be nice to go on trips to extend my knowledge of arts and expression."

"I get frustrated not being able to express myself due to my poor standard as regards the English language."

"I would like us to sit in silence for at least half an hour - without any interruptions and try to write and then listen to each other and comment and discuss etc."

"I would like to see the current creative writing course continue and expand with a possible follow up advanced course."

The invitation to add further comments was not taken up.

Tutor's Response to the Findings of the Questionnaire

We were encouraged by the positive comments from both the users and the staff. We have taken steps to investigate the ways in which the project can be developed which take on board the issues raised. As an example we discussed with the group as to how, if appropriate, some time in each session can be a quiet period for individual writing.

Selection of Work

We have included a selection of writing from the users to demonstrate the diversity of the level of ability within the group. Surnames have been removed.

November

The grey coldness of the day surrounds me in a kind of oppressive coldness. I am so far from home and just cannot escape the loneliness of this day and I bow my head into the wind as it lashes and whips icy needles of rain into my face and penetrates through my clothes and deep into my skin, seemingly to my soul.

This is the day that winter arrives, a dark November day that seems to me lost in time or in a time of its own. The streets are empty and washed with grey, it's Sunday and everyone is doing something different, something warmer, in a seemingly different clime or snuggled round open fires in happy families, or at least they are in my illusions.

At last I see home beckoning, something warm and comforting in the distance , a refuge from the bleakness and imagined threats that entered my mind, at least a rest from winter's strife.

Gary 20/11/96

Hillsborough

I was at Hillsborough when the disaster happened. There was quite a lot of people who lost a lot of family and friends. The police officers who were on duty had to go and tell the people who could not be there that they had lost loved ones or family. The stewards were very busy helping to get the injured people out of the stand where the disaster was. Both the teams visited both the General and the Hallamshire hospitals. I was stood next to John Parrott the snooker player. He was with the Liverpool fans. It happened when the embassy world snooker was on at the Crucible Theatre. I went to see him play his match that night and he won.

Patrick January 1997

This Woman In Mind

This woman in MIND. She has straight curly hair brown blonde, a bit short on the eyes, a short bit of a fringe, a bony long nose. Her age is about 35 years of age. Her clothes, blouse and wears skirts. She has nice personality kind to talk to, has white teeth. She is white, she is thin quite tall and medium shoulders, medium size that's her figure. Bad habits, she smokes doesn't drink, bites her nails. Her face, she has a thin face and has small eyes and medium size lips.

Billy February 1997

A Depressive's Christmas Or Just Another Winters Day

(for Helen who may just appreciate the thoughts)

Dawn creeps in sheepishly, in total silence,
The birds too cold and forlorn to turn the sleeper
From invading dreams that acidly singe the conscience,
And colour the delicate, fragile scenery of the mind,
Adjusting it in accordance with the bleakness of the day.

Eyes, now flicked open by natures nagging finger,
Gaze upon the clouded reality hanging heavy in the room,
And catches of dreams now scurry like tiny, timid, troubled mice,
To hide in dimlit recesses in the walls of the mind,
To wait, plot and contemplate their next manic escapade.

Now stirred my brain races and dances with writhing, weary worries,
And the cold, stark bleached linen smell of morning
Shocks my emotions, flinging them mercilessly into the arena of the day.
Reality strikes the bell, this is Christmas Day I fear!
And it seems as if I alone have not fallen under a midwinter spell.

Curtains like a rended veil reveal a scene of far too early children,
Playing in youthful ignorance on this seasons stage,
Whipping up a to energised, frantic pandemonium,
Teasing, testing, tormenting this still innocent pallid morning.
I reach to steal the frenzied joy but my emotions draw back, empty handed.

I cannot hear bells ringing out holy bliss,
I cannot smell the warm spicy festive cup or taste its heady brew
Nor can I see gentlemen giving alms and onward to chapel,
Or snow lovingly blessing the sacred with an ethereal glow
No scenes to enlighten the soul towards good deeds.

This it seems is just another dark winter's day,
Huddling itself around the east's fading warmth,
And turning its face from the biting jaws of coldness
that lingers around and grins icily at its prey
A day like a creaking cog wheel's winding way to another time.

Gary 26th December 1997

13

Resolutions

1 Stop drinking alcohol
2 Stop making alcohol
3 Stop being obsessive
4 Be more patient
5 Make effort to sort out emotional problems
6 Learn to be more forgiving
7 Keep place tidy
8 Stop making excuses
9 Move home
10 Win Alyson

1 I can't have 1 or 2 drinks. I drink and the consequence is always the same. I end up smashed out of my skull. I've been admitted to hospital 6 times for drying out and once due to falling on glass whilst drinking. I've turned yellow on at least 1 occasion and my liver has become enlarged. I have frequent liver function tests and suffer mood swings, the latter costing me dearly quite recently - my girlfriend finished with me. I aim to get back with her, that means I must not drink.

2 I usually make about 2000 pints of beer per year as I can't afford to buy the stuff very often from pubs and off licences. It takes up a lot of time and space. Obviously if I don't drink then I don't need to make any.

3 Alcoholics tend to be obsessive people. I drink alcohol obsessively, exercise obsessively, I am obsessive about nutrition, saving money. I drink coffee obsessively when I'm going through 'dry' periods. At the moment I'm spending no money on anything except food which means I'm depriving myself while saving my money. That's obsessive.

4 I want everything now, maybe that's why I'm so obsessive. I can't wait to have money for that rainy day, can't wait to be drunk, can't wait for the caffeine to make me alert, can't wait to be the fittest person around. I get impatient when things don't work out, which is a form of self punishment. Perhaps I should say be more kind to myself than be patient.

5 A nervous breakdown led to my emotional problems although it's a bit which comes first the chicken or the egg. As a result of the NB, I became an alcoholic. Alcohol doesn't get rid of emotional problems - it stops one from sorting them out. Stopping drinking is, therefore, a good first step.

6 This is a problem for me. I've had so many people treat me badly particularly before the nervous breakdown and then due to the physical problems which sprung from it, and also from my drinking which is merely a symptom not a problem in itself. I've not slept properly since I was 11 years old and society will not accept that. I get so tired as a result of this and therefore it gets at me. Examples: - a)falling asleep at school - b) falling asleep on machines at work including once when I risked my life, and others, working on a power press which I put out of operation for 2 days. I resent the way people treat me for such symptoms such as school teachers embarrassing me in front of the whole class saying 'Go to bed earlier' and being told off at work for holding up the assembly line. Such ignorance makes me resent not only my persecutors but also the medical profession for not helping or understanding and also my mum and dad and other relatives for damaging me in the first place. Resentments are damaging. I need to forgive.

7 Having an untidy home can be depressing. That doesn't help me emotionally. Being tired can make it difficult to make an effort so, too,' can being constantly stoned out of my head. I get impatient when I try and tidy the place and I seem to be making more mess than I'm actually cleaning up due to being tired.

8 This is difficult this. When have I a valid reason and when am I just making excuses. I need to do some homework maybe.

9 This place is impossible. It's noisy since the building was not built very well. I can hear other tenants walking about, blasting music, slamming doors, using the loo, even putting a cup on the table. We've a double junction with traffic lights at the bottom of our drive. The traffic's noisy 24 hours a day. We've 200-300 people trespassing, many extremely noisy, passing by my window all day long. I've no fridge, wardrobe, cupboard, tools, nowhere to put things. It's depressing, I must move.

10 Alyson is by far the loveliest girl I've been out with, we get on so well. have so much in common, so many similar interests. She's still very fond of me. All I need to do to is sort myself out and I'm sure she'll be back. I want her more than anything.

Steve - January 1997

15

Ghost Town

Greyness enshrouds a tarnished town,
Fingers of light trying to stab their way
Through clammy, clinging clouds
Go unnoticed, failing to inspire fettered minds.

Trudging dank roads and loitering in shadow,
Indifference plagues the inspired,
To release a thought of liberation,
And entomb the mind in darkness.

A life frozen in anticipation
Of the enlightenment never coming,
A soul grasping in desperation
At passing dreams of grandeur.

Now this hour trudges forward,
And though fighting before its death,
It fails to console the traveller
Or release him from this path.

Gary January 1997

Poem On The Death Of A Friend

'Neath the 'oggin-side bushes I shelter,
Where my friend hanged himself 14 years aged.
My poor heart leaps! My mind's helter skelter.

Against the seeming injustice I raged.
Life can be so alien and cruel.
I stare at rats playing near the 'oggin.

A piece of fish petrified. The dual
feelings of my pummelled heart, Oh heart!
.....Its hopelessness.....stinking like spent fuel.

All my family played a grieving part
as your own. For to us you'd been so kind.
May your spirit make, my friend, a fresh start.

Do you remember us carol singing?
Sweet as an angel's your soprano voice!
Much extra cash to each of us bringing.

Some said his scarf was tied; some said it caught
on a bush. I wonder ...had you a choice?
so gentle a lad. such hard lessons taught.

But one day I hope we will be smiling
as we did of yore; and this grief will pass.
The shore- waves lap sounds like iron filings.

Beside the 'oggin that day on the grass -
Your memory never letting me rest.

Dedicated to Mickey Verral from Jed. 'oggin = canal (Sussex dialect)

17

What's It Like To Go Without Sleep For A Length Of Time

I spend most of the night trying to sleep. I force myself out of bed in the mornings and usually spend some time slumped in a chair with my eyes closed. I then spend the day trying to feel awake.

I usually develop a craving for coffee and can go through a jar of Nescafe in three days. Everything becomes an effort and even making a cup of coffee can be a big task.

I find it hard to focus on what people are saying to me or on what I'm saying or doing. Everyday words escape me making it difficult to communicate with people. I make mistakes, errors of judgement, have accidents, walk across the road without looking. I trap my hands shutting doors, break my finger nails putting a key in the lock. I'm forever tripping over things, bumping into things, dropping things, failing to pick things up such as hankies and cutlery.

I play guitar and forget what comes next despite the fact that I've just played the chord sequence several times and have been playing the piece for years.

I forget what day it is or what I did yesterday. People say, 'Did you have a good weekend?'. I can't remember.

I found it hard to stay awake at school, at work, doing classes at college, night school at AA and other meetings. It's embarrassing to be asked a question at a meeting or class when I've no idea what the speaker has been talking about. (The last time this happened was quite recently.) It makes me want to stay away from people.

I'm not talking about boredom here nor about something that happens to everyone once in a while, I'm talking about sheer mental exhaustion that can go on day after day even minute after minute. It leads to loneliness, isolation, boredom, frustration, agitation, anger, depression utter despair.

Then there's always the idiot who says pull yourself together.

Steve February 1997

Two Trees Making Love In A Garden

Two trees making love in a Garden
Two evergreens
Huddling together their branches
Cuddling one another
With a good wind to ride to

It is an extraordinary sight
There never was a couple
Of humans that held so close
Dancing
branches prancing like they are mad

They are still at it I see
From my window
And no bird dare perch thereon
to disturb their sacred movements

One tree is quite small in comparison
to the other
I wonder if trees get married
if they do these two are ideal matchmakers
Assuming the little one
Is not underage

I do not know if this picture
pleases the Creator
I know it pleased me.

Jedd Nervous 1997

Spring

A green spring when everything' all' the flowers start to blom People start to take some of their clothes off when it starts getting just that little bit warmer The flower start to come out. The trees start to come out and it is lovely. The clock go back when it becomes a bit like summer. It's not summer but it feels like its spring. I don't know what its like in the woods in spring, The grass turns green. Daffodils come out, the bees pollinate the Daffodils . Tulips come out. people start wearing. wearing light clothes Its when the sun comes out. everything becomes brighter.

Billy 1997

19

The Door

There is a door that is locked in my mind,
Static and hard.
Desperately trying to hold the past in place.
Yet what was sometimes is and
Eases and claws its
Crafty way through and
OUT!
Through a keyhole of weakness,
TO BE
Here and now.
Sometimes happy and freeing
Warm thoughts.
But often dark, sinister and cold.
Deliberate
Depressing shades of starkness with
No emotions to hide reality.
And the door is creaking,
Groaning in an urgency.
Thoughts needing to escape.
Past's power colouring sobriety.
Staining and artfully
Addling wits.
Mind awash with diffidence
Consternation.

Yet future is fighting back
With its own fears.
Or maybe more gently
Calm lullings of
Hope. Or if it dares
Freedom.
Could happiness be toying with this Mind?
And yet the door still stands
As if it were a sentinel,
And like me
Between the two.

Gary Feb 1997.

[Monologue based upon a photo of an elderly woman staring out of a railway carriage, looking rather doleful.]

Nearly there - end of the line - just a few people to get off. Not many travellers now. Every one has a car - car parks full, all the men at work.--- Only children coming home from school. Mothers shepherding the youngest

Goodness. Three children! How can she she manage - so young and pretty - aren't her skirts short, they all wear those mini-skirts nowadays. --- Three children. Just like me - **he's** not old enough to go to school yet, Ahh twins, - of course, that's how she's done it. **Double** Buggies nowadays, how marvellous, - so easy - no trouble; just strap them in. Goodness! her legs *are* long!

When I was her age I wore short skirts, and her hair, I had mine cut just like she has,! what was it we called it? Bob Cut that was it, The Bob Cut. Don't suppose they call it that now. Mine was thick and black. How Mama cried when she saw my short hair, all my lovely long tresses gone, -- forever. Papa said that I would go blind with that fringe in front of my eyes and when I started wearing the new dresses which revealed my knees Mama was horrified, I think Papa liked them, he said I had pretty knees. When the boys came home they thought it was grand. Only they weren't boys anymore, they didn't laugh like they used to.

I'm glad that Charlie came home.- He adored my New Look.- How he stared at my knees!

Dear old Charlie, what ever would he have made of those long legs! - Thre's a lot more to stare at nowadays!.

OOPS! There goes the Dummy, - pick it up Mum, goodness that skirt is short Well really! showing her bottom like that! Hmm *Red ones!* We all know what sort of girl wears *Red ones!*, surely not her though, she looks too nice, open honest face, wide eyes reflected in the children, a boy and two girls,. Just like me. So busy - So carefree - no thought of tomorrow. Tomorrow never comes - but it does.
And then its yesterday. Don't think of yesterday, don't remember. Please don't start remembering.

I never forgot.

It wasn't fair.

He was so young - - too young - - So long ago now. ----- It wasn't fair.

I had a pair of Red ones once, Dear old Charlie bought them for me.

"To cheer you up". he said.

To stop me worrying,

"Take your mind off things."

"He'll be all right."

"Chip of the old block." 21

"The blighters couldn't get me."

"Don't worry, the lads smart."

"He'll be all right."

"You see, chip off the old block,"

He was so-young. ----- Too young.

"What the Lord giveth the Lord taketh away".

Good, off we go again, soon be home now. --------No, not home. Not now, only a house. A house is not a home, home is where the heart is. Home is where families live.

Oh Charlie.

Ray 1997

The Fall of Night

Dark the shadows fall and
darker still to come,
the night tiptoes in
softly
Silently.
Surely.
A descending azure veil
foretells the decline of day,
and dusts with duskiness
the bowing bluebells
mourning heads.
Surviving sunlight surrenders ans
crosses the Stygian ferry,
leaving trees to shudder, sway and
swoon.
and to fashion a
dark conclave of towering Gods.

And not their poised friend frees
a song inspired by the
owl's light of moon.
It lulls and lilts and lifts the
mesmerised mind to
thoughts of Diana,
whose full beauty is now
enhanced by the silver soul
above.
This same restful refrain must have
soothed young hearts when earth
was in the first flourish of spring,
A tune that must have stemmed from
some other paradise.

Is the mind caught in a waking
dream,
drowsed, dulled,
denied of disquiet.
OR
is this another
reality,
whose kith and kin
I have yet to know?

Gary 1997